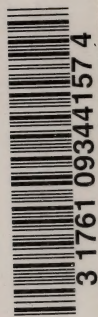


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EMILY CHAMBERLAIN COOK PRIZE POEM

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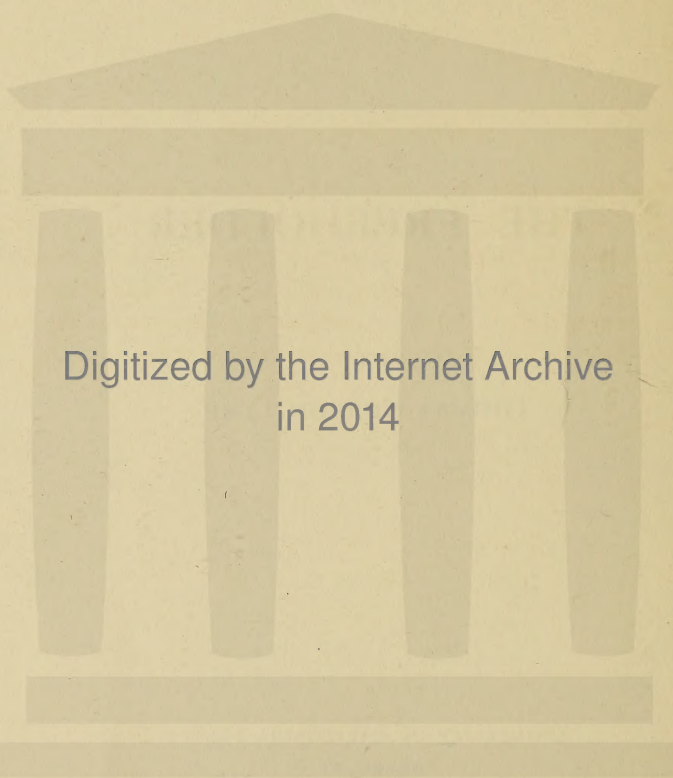
THE FREEHOLDER

BY

THOMAS GORDON LUKE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY

1916



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PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the third award of the Emily Chamberlain Cook Prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook of Yale University to the University of California for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of Award consisting of Professor Edward Bliss Reed of Yale University, Professor Cornelius Beach Bradley of the University of California, and Mr. Robert Frost.

THE FREEHOLDER

THOMAS GORDON LUKE

I. HARVEST

In the gray dawn, out to the harvest field
The busy wagons rattle, one by one,
Along the roads, and when day has begun
To warm the hills, where sheaves lie packed and sealed
With sparkling frost, the shouting farmers wield
Their bending forks; until the laden sun
Turns down the broad, gleaned sky, and homeward run
The wagons down the roads. So meadows yield
Their harvests, till the hay is stacked, and grain
Heaps at the bin's high level, and the loft
Holds the red apples, where the sun slants still
And golden through a web-lined window-pane.
At last, like small white hands, the flakes rest soft
Upon the borders of the wind-swept hill.

II. INDIAN SUMMER

Weary with toil, I stroll beside a stream
Beneath the birches' gold and white, and pass
By winding eddies, and a pool's green glass,
Where startled trout dart swift, with flashing gleam
Of silver. Here on holidays I dream,
Until the sunset burns the meadow-grass
And the far-spreading forest is a mass
Of shadows. In the rising moon's white beam
Homeward I ride, and watch the mountain height
Grow brighter, while the breezes sing a psalm
And silver floods surround the elm-tree grove;
And, in the darker hours of the night,
Through fields where gently flows the river, calm
As the peace of snows when skies are still above.

III. SEASON'S END

The harvesters have scattered, and the days
Are quiet. Long the first white flakes have fled
Across the fields, with willow leaves, sun-bled;
And sunsets burn the peaks with flaming haze.
The river-flecking birches are a maze
Of fluttering golden leaf-hearts, where the red
Stems of the willows by their spring-sides thread
And hold till dusk the auburn sunset's blaze.
With brooding forests rolling dark behind
And the deep valley spreading wide before,
Here at the borders of the woods, I dwell
In a small cabin, waiting for the wind
To drive the snowstorms to the valley floor
And charm the forest with enchanting spell.

IV. STORM WIND

At dusk the wind from cloudy skylines swept
And sobbed and murmured in the elm-trees round
My shaded cabin, shaking to the ground
The aged leaves. And all the night it kept
The branches tapping at the logs, which wept
With giant tears; and lines of mist-web wound
Across the hills. At dawn, with sudden pound,
It rushed, and swung the cabin door, and leapt
Into the room where like a creature wild
It battered at the walls, and screamed, and broke
Clay from the logs, and in the rafters crept;
Then dropped to silence, like a sobbing child.
That day the winter in the mountains woke;
And long the fields in cloaks of snow have slept.

V. THE WIZARD

Old Winter is a wizard. First he turns
The leaves to flakes of gold, then blows them down
And rolls them up in heaps of sodden brown.
Then, down the chimney, where my pitch-fire burns,
He puffs the rising smoke, and swiftly churns
The snowflakes past the panes. And like a clown
He laughs and sings and dances through the town,
A high, white whirlwind; till the rover yearns
To seek the valley where the white streams run
Beneath their floors of ice, to glide and track
On smooth steel runners, while the sportive wind
Snaps at his cheeks. At last the heavy sun
Grins red through bars of trees, and birch limbs crack,
And mountains shine like steel, with night behind!

VI. THE SLEEP

Earth cannot see the charms that round her lie,
Nor feel the icy winds that tear and sweep:
Beneath the winter snow she lies asleep.
Out of the frozen forest comes the cry
Of the gray timber-wolf; and snow-owls fly
Above the fir-edged gullies, and where deep
River-carved canyons stretch, and crags rise steep,
And mountain-pyramids soar black and high.
Yet, in the long and solitary night,
I love to ride on deep, uncertain trails,
And feel wild-staring Winter's frozen breath;
While the pure, moonlit hills shine calm and white,
And pines stand firmly, though the black wind wails,
Waiting the ending of the winter-death.

VII. THE MESSAGE

I found a note beneath my cabin door,
Above the steps, snow-rounded, soft and white;
And by the snapping fire, in the lantern light,
It told that the flake-hidden valley-floor
Now rang with sleigh-bells, and the songs and lore
Of the Christmas Spell spoke in the wind at night;
For, in dark kitchens, elf and fairy sprite
Baked secret pies and puddings; and the store
In the little village shone with trinkets striped
With gold and red, and shaped like eggs and bells
And spinning tops, in windows flaked and veiled.
Then in the night small mountain-voices piped,
And winds, with glorias like organ swells,
Over the sparkling hills and forest sailed.

VIII. THE RIDE

The road is broken to the town ; and bright
With pale blue fire upon the hardened snow
Glisten the sleigh-tracks. Cabin windows glow
From distant trees. As winter birds in flight
Sail through the clouds, I glide on through the white
High mounds and drifts. The silver bells sing low
With streams that through their crystal ice-caves flow,
To radiant groups of stars, that fill the night
With silver showers. Through the light of dawn
Rise spires, and smoke-lines rest, suspended still
Beneath the clouds, where circling pigeons fly.
And now the morning sun-fire strikes upon
The spires, the snow-road, and the rounded hill,
And wakes to day this City of the Sky.

IX. OLD FRIENDS

How sweet it is, in the lone settler's eyes,
To see the village decked in Christmas green!
And faces of old comrades, seldom seen—
The hearty shakes, the smiles of bright surprise!
To see, when from the sky the sunlight dies,
Dark lines of shadow spread across the sheen
Of snowy roofs, with edges cold and clean,
From fretting elm-trees, when the ice-wind cries.
Returning in the night through scattered pines,
To see again the cabin, standing still
And dark against the skies and heavy snows.
A single star behind its chimney shines;
The frozen trees stand out upon the hill:
But now my furnace laughs and smokes and glows!

X. IN THE DEEP WOODS

Joy to run deep beyond the forest's edge!
Here stand deserted cabins with deep snow
Inside and out. Here with a long gray bow
A fir-tree bends. With crosseut saw and wedge,
Keen-bladed ax and heavy-pounding sledge,
I shape curved runners, and with heigh and ho
Deeper into the tamaracks I go
Over the snowfields. Here a willow hedge
Trims the low gully; now the valley floor
Gleams down afar; now dark the forest grows,
And pounding currents boom within the gorge.
Joy to be in the woods and hear the roar
Of flame that melts the ice, and screams and glows,
The woodman's hearth-fire, and the woodman's forge!

XI. SIGNS OF SPRING

All day I trimmed the logs within the pines,
And chained them to the sled in evening's blue,
When muscles hum, and ears are humming too,
And through the woods the yellow sun-glow shines
And strikes the mountain's rim, with hues like wines.
I watched the rainbow-circled moon, that grew
Like a winter flower, and thought of friends I knew
Before the heavy snows; and looked for signs
Of the new spring. O Spring, come soon, come soon!
I long to ride far, in my new-built sleigh,
Into the hills, where comrades meet again.
Come with thy music and thy warmer moon!
Far through the mountains we will ride, till day
Gleams on the valley and the distant plain!

XII. THE BREAK-UP

Winter had bound the willow stems with locks
Of ice, and hung white horns on cabin walls,
Edged all the fir-trees in the forest halls,
And hid the bushes, fences, logs and rocks.
Winter had heaped the river's edge with blocks
Of ice; and birch-tree branches beamed with balls
And beads of crystal. Now the distant calls
Of pheasants drummed, and speckled grouse in flocks
Rested on turbaned fence-posts, and the sun
Rose earlier to bless the crystal morn.
The beating lines of flakes no longer sped
Across the fields, or in the willows spun.
Out of the forest sounded the silver horn
Of Spring; and snow-floods to the river fled.

XIII. RELEASE

Far in the forest woodmen's axes rang,
And lower strayed the long-imprisoned deer;
From broken skies smiled April, mild and clear;
The bluejays laughed, the wild canaries sang.
The log-saw hummed; the sledge's heavy clang
Mixed with the woodmen's shouts of mirth and cheer.
In the bright sunlight of the turning year
Gold-drinking buttercups in meadows sprang.
Beneath the glancing sun, my golden clock,
Daily I plowed, and turned fresh-sprinkled snow
Into the furrows, till the dusk fell gray.
At night, on roads of gleaming granite rock
I galloped to the village, deep below,
Where flute and banjo scorned the dawning day.

XIV. THE SUMMIT OF THE YEAR

From cherry orchards languid breezes bear
The blossoms, Summer's snowflakes, till they ride
And, fluttering, fall where, by the bunch-grass, hide
The waxen petals of the prickly pear.
And yellow butterflies go floating where
The clover field lies deep and green and wide,
Over the pink-frilled bitterroot they glide
Into the forest, in the noonday glare.
Yet soon again shall bend the stems of grain
Over still waters. Soon the full-blown rose
Shall fall apart, by autumn heat oppressed.
The restless wind shall beat and toss again;
Over the fields shall spread new sunset snows—
The millwheel of the year has reached the crest!

XV. DAY'S END

Deserted home in the forest! scattered leaves
Blown by the winds of autumn strew thy floors!
Broken thy windows and ax-carven doors,
Winter within, a weary exile, grieves,
And for the roof a snowy mantle weaves.
Between the logs the summer sunlight pours,
And into them the yellowhammer bores.
Upon the field no longer lie the sheaves.
Yet, still the lightning throws across the sky
Fast-bending steel. At eve the Northern Bars
Of flame arise in ranks of glowing white.
The rising robins from the valley fly
Into the shadowing forest. Pilgrim stars
Pick up their staves and travel through the night!

